

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 301

By Parkinson

A RESOLUTION to recognize and honor the Montford Point Marines.

WHEREAS, in 1941, as the United States was preparing to enter World War II, the need for recruits brought race-based discriminatory hiring practices into sharp focus; civil rights leaders were organizing for change, while President Franklin D. Roosevelt and key military leaders remained opposed to opening up the defense industry to African Americans; and

WHEREAS, A. Philip Randolph, who had organized and led the first African-American labor union—the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—was planning a march on Washington to pressure President Roosevelt to allow African Americans to serve in the military; as the march grew closer, the president conceded and on June 25, 1941, signed Executive Order 8802, prohibiting racial discrimination in the defense industry or in government, thus opening all branches of the Armed Forces to African Americans; and

WHEREAS, although the order recognized a need to prevent discrimination, it made no mention of ending the military's standing policies of segregation; on June 1, 1942, the Marine Corps began its recruitment of Black men, quickly filling its 900-man quota. The first class of Black recruits arrived at Montford Point in North Carolina to find nothing, as their training grounds were miles away from Camp Lejeune, where the white recruits were trained; and

WHEREAS, when Montford Point was established, everyone in charge was white; the Marine Corps' goal was to train Montford Marines to take over the training of future Black recruits. By late 1943, the staff had chosen Black marines to replace the white instructors, with Colonel Samuel A. Woods, Jr., becoming the first commander at Montford Point; and

WHEREAS, by 1944, a total of 18,000 Black marines were enlisted in service, with 12,000 being deployed overseas; between 1942 and 1949, approximately 20,000 African-American marine recruits trained at Montford Point; and

WHEREAS, although the Marine Corps finally allowed Black volunteers to enlist, it set specific limits on how many could join and which jobs they were eligible for; they were not permitted to give orders to white marines, and, at the beginning of World War II, they were not allowed to become officers; and

WHEREAS, when Frederick C. Branch, one of the early Montford Point Marines, expressed interest in attending Marine Corps' Officer Candidate School (OCS), he was told to forget about it; undeterred, Mr. Branch persevered in the hope that his high-quality work and work ethic would change his circumstances. Although he continued to excel, he was thwarted once again; however, in November 1945, his tenacity proved fruitful, and he was admitted to OCS, becoming the first African American to earn a commission in the Marine Corps; and

WHEREAS, representation, in the form of Frederick Branch, made the idea of becoming an officer seem more attainable for Black marines, and little by little, cracks began to form in the Corps' practice of racial segregation; and

WHEREAS, racial segregation in the Armed Forces was at last prohibited in July 1948, when President Harry Truman, under added pressure by A. Philip Randolph and other civil rights leaders, signed Executive Order 9981; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize and honor the Montford Point Marines, the first African-American recruits in the Marine Corps—valiant trailblazers who helped bring an end to the military's longstanding policy of racial segregation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.